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ABSTRACT

This training module is intended to familiarize vocational education teachers with the techniques of small group instruction. It covers the following topics: the characteristics of a small group (participation, cooperation, controversy, and consensus); the benefits of learning in small groups (including promotion of active learning; student responsibility for learning; and higher-level and secondary learning that is centered around the learner); the role of the instructor in small group instruction (planner, housekeeper, material developer, initiator, timekeeper, discussion promoter, process observer, consultant, facilitator, evaluator, summarizer, model, and reinforcer); the four stages of group development (forming, storming, norming, and performing); activities that can improve the productivity of small groups (informing students about the group process, being explicit about group objectives, facilitating movement toward a performing level, and offering feedback); six attributes of effective small group activities (designing activities so that they are interesting, clearly defined, sequenced, well paced, flexible, and participative); types of activities for use in small groups (ice-breakers, brainstorming, buzz groups, the Phillips 66 technique, expanding groups, normal group process, and the fishbowl); and resources for designing or adapting existing small group activities. (MN)

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VOCATIONAL INSTRUCTOR TEACHING SKILLS PROJECT

SMALL GROUP TEACHING TECHNIQUES

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Vocational Instructor Teaching Skills Project

Small Group Teaching Techniques

Resource Packet

This packet contains resource materials to help you design and use small groups for classroom teaching. These materials supplement the videotape Small Group Teaching Techniques. After viewing the videotape and reading the enclosed materials you should be able to:

* Discuss four characteristics of a small group;
* List at least seven benefits of learning via small groups;
* List at least seven responsibilities that an instructor should meet when using small groups;
* Define the four stages of group development;
* List four activities that can improve the productivity of small groups;
* Discuss six attributes of effective small group activities;
* Locate three resources for designing or adapting existing small group activities.

We have included two short forms for your feedback about this training module. Please take a minute to complete these forms. Completed forms can be sent to Jim Rollins at the address below or returned to your campus staff development office.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact:

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CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SMALL GROUP

The small group is an instructional method that encourages active learning. The small group method includes interaction and sharing by group members through group activities and communication. Structured activities offer access to the instructor's expertise and guidance.

Learning in small groups is more successful when the group uses:

participation;

cooperation;

controversy; and

consensus.

PARTICIPATION is vital to successful learning. Students cannot learn unless they attend to what's being taught. Active, participating learners are more likely to attend.

COOPERATION involves students working towards common goals. Explicit, detailed goals and objectives help students learn more efficiently and effectively. In groups, a synergy develops. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

CONTROVERSY helps the group delineate and explore a variety of ideas and opinions. People are often uncomfortable with controversy and work to avoid it. Controversy will arise. It is beneficial. Productive methods for handling controversy include an exchange of ideas in a non-threatening setting, group focus on the ideas offered rather than personalities, and an acceptable method for group decision making.

CONSENSUS is the decision making process of choice. In perfect consensus all agree with the choice. Agreement is total and unanimous. This does happen. Not often, but it does happen. A more likely outcome is to arrive at a mediated group consensus where everyone:

1. Has been heard and had a chance to influence the group
2. Understands the decision
3. Is willing to try the decision.

Other, less effective decision making procedures include authoritative choice by leader, choice by leader with "input" from others, majority rule (take a vote), and no decision.

Small groups promote individual involvement and group interaction. Participants deal with the subject matter content and the group process - what happens to and between members.

SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTION

BENEFITS

The small group promotes:

- Active learning
- Student responsibility for learning
- Higher level learning
  - typically involves analysis & evaluation
- Secondary learning
  - develops social skills, communications, teamwork, problem solving.
- Learning centered on the learner
  - learners have some control over what they learn, and how they learn it. They can determine direction, pace, and character of learning.

Other advantages of using small groups for learning include:

- Groups require only modest resources.
  - chairs, tables, charts, blackboards
  - design & instruments can be reused.
- Groups are applicable over a wide range of topics, student ages, abilities, skills, backgrounds, and class sizes.
- Peer pressure and motivation tend to increase attendance and decrease dropout rate.
- Students invest more work in classes that use small groups. They feel positive about small group learning opportunities and believe small groups to be more effective than lecture classes.
- Groups appear to increase efficiency and effectiveness of learning. Performance of the group is consistently better than the performance of individual members.
- Groups treat learners' thoughts and experiences as important parts of the learning process.
- Groups have more resources than individuals.

SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTION

LIMITATIONS AND ROADBLOCKS

Some educators believe that small groups can and should be used in most learning situations. They believe that adequate planning, competent use, and attention to group process as well as course content can overcome the problems that occur when using small groups.

Other educators believe there are circumstances when other instructional methods are more appropriate. Specific limitations cited by these educators include:

1. Small groups do not facilitate lower level learning as well as other methods;

2. A small percent of learners need direct guidance from an authority figure;

3. Students with poor social, cooperative, and communicative skills receive limited benefits from the small group;

4. Small groups require high quality design and activities which take time and energy to locate or develop;

5. Small groups are time intensive. With a prescribed amount of content to be covered and a limited amount of time, the benefits of the small group appear nebulous and elusive.

6. Small groups can be wasteful.

Inept planning, inadequate facilities, or poorly designed group activities can damage the effectiveness of the small group. Other variables that diminish small group effectiveness include:

1. Students have beliefs that inhibit successful learning in small groups.

   A. Students generally do not think they can learn anything from fellow students.

   B. Students often do not have positive attitudes toward group work.

   C. Students would often prefer taking lecture notes to participating in a group. Note-taking is the activity with which they are most familiar and most comfortable.

   D. Students often view disagreements with their ideas as personal attacks.

   E. Students may set their goal as "winning" or getting their own way instead of developing the best solution.

2. Teachers often have attitudes that inhibit group work.

   A. Teachers often do not think that students can learn anything from fellow students.

   B. Teachers often do not have positive attitudes toward group work.

   C. Teachers often revere the written word much more than the spoken word.

   D. Teachers often highly value a quiet, orderly classroom.

   E. Teachers often believe that all learning must be highly structured.

   F. Teachers often see their role as lecture or disseminator of information.

   G. Teachers often subscribe to the myth that competition or working alone builds character, self-esteem, and motivation.

3. Administrators often have attitudes that inhibit group work.

SMALL GROUPS
THE INSTRUCTOR'S ROLE

Small group learning activities require that instructors relinquish center stage. Instructors using small group learning techniques give up the spotlight and the prestige that accompany the lecture. Instead of serving as the primary source of knowledge, instructors take on a number of different responsibilities.

PLANNER -	decides group size, group composition, class objectives, specific activities, etc.
HOUSEKEEPER -	coordinates supplies, equipment, and other logistical support.
MATERIAL DEVELOPER -	designs activities and support materials that assist learners in reaching course objectives.
INITIATOR -	states objectives clearly and points out practical aspects of content and activities.
TIMEKEEPER -	sets time limits; keeps groups oriented and on task.
DISCUSSION PROMOTER -	facilitates participation; encourages quiet group members to be more active; fosters listening skills.
PROCESS OBSERVER -	records and reports in a non-judgmental fashion what processes occur within groups. Accurate observations help group members assess what is happening and determine ways to improve the group's productivity.
EXTERNAL CONSULTANT -	provides content knowledge and group process techniques as needed.
RESOURCE CONSULTANT -	provides additional resources (books, videos, people, etc.) to enable groups to explore a topic in more depth.
GROUP FACILITATOR -	restates process activities and main ideas.
EVALUATOR -	provides criteria based evaluation of group products and process.
SUMMARIZER -	offers closure and coherence.
MODEL -	uses appropriate collaborative and communicative skills.
REINFORCER -	gives positive feedback for appropriate behavior as well as for appropriate group products.

PLANNING FOR THE SMALL GROUP

Small groups are more spontaneous than lectures but good planning is still required to enhance the learning experience. As the instructor, you must plan both the content and the group process. Categories to address when planning small groups include:

Objectives - if you don't know where you're going, you won't know when you get there. Good objectives include descriptions of performances required, criteria used, and any conditions in effect.

Group Size - The optimum group size is 4 - 7 members. The optimum size will depend on many factors, including the tasks to be performed, members' communication and group processing skills, members' background and knowledge, and time available.

The larger a group, the more variety of ideas and overall resources there is available. But the larger group limits individual participation, group unity, and group cohesion. Four to seven members strikes a good balance.

Groups of 2-3 members are often used for short tasks where members have limited social skills.

Assignment of group members - Hetereogeneous groups are usually desired to increase group resources. Most research indicates higher achievement with hetereogenous groups. Random group assignment usually allows for adequate heterogeneity. On ocassion you may want to form groups with similar characteristics (e.g. sex, age, experience, learning styles, etc).

Physical Environment - If possible, plan for a room with movable furniture. The physical space presents a message of expected behavior. Circles are popular because they allow group members to see and hear each other and share instructional materials.

Time - Develop a realistic time schedule. Decide when and how to move the groups toward some defined conclusion.

Materials - Appropriate and stimulating training materials are extremely important in small groups. Your expertise and guidance is offered to students through these materials. Well developed materials keep group members focused on the task at hand.

Leaders - Assigned leaders help groups focus more quickly on the designated tasks. Drawbacks include possible group feeling of being manipulated and the chance that you have not chosen the best leader. For most small group activities, formal leaders are not necessary. Leadership roles are assumed by group members as needed.

PROCESS AND THE SMALL GROUP

Learning groups focus on both content and process. Content is the subject matter being studied. Process is what happens among group members, between group members and the instructor, and between group members and the training materials.

This process can be highly productive and efficient for one group and non-productive and chaotic for another group. Or, it can be chaotic one day and productive the next for the same group. Good instructors observe the effectiveness of the small group process and help move a group to a productive level.

Groups are dynamic. They typically progress through several stages of development. One well known model (Tuckman 1965) identifies four stages of development:

FORMING
STORMING
NORMING
PERFORMING.

FORMING: a period of uncertainty when members try to determine the group's task and individual roles.
Indicators include:
1) Low trust and caution
2) Dependency on a leader
3) Politeness dominates; Conflict avoided
4) Anxiety regarding rules and protocol

STORMING: conflicts arise and group members rebel.
Indicators include:
1) Disagreement about goals, methods, priorities, and standards
2) Tense environment
3) Resistance to leaders and agendas
4) Formation of cliques

NORMING: group establishes cohesiveness and commitment and finds new ways to work together.
Indicators include:
1) Resolution of conflicts, either implicit or explicit
2) Better defined goals and expectations
3) Feeling of group unity
4) Methods to handle conflict

PERFORMING: proficient and flexible in methods of achieving goals.
Indicators include:
1) Efficient operations
2) Individuals and groups are productive
3) Few distractions
4) Responsibility to the group

STEPS TO

IMPROVING PRODUCTIVITY

IN THE SMALL GROUP

1) Inform students about the group process. Awareness of the group stages and related pitfalls will help them diagnose group problems earlier and handle them more effectively.

2) Be explicit about the group objectives. Offer criteria of excellence. Guidelines will minimize distractions. Reward group members on the basis of the quality of the group product.

3) Facilitate movement toward a performing level. Short, non-threatening activities that require group members to interact will help "break the ice" for a new group and reduce time spent in the forming stage.

4) Offer feedback to the groups about their processing skills. Examples of group activities to observe and report on include:

PARTICIPATION - Are all members participating or are there "loafers" in the group?

DECISION-MAKING - Are decisions arrived at by consensus, majority rule, strong-arm tactics, or some other method?

NORMS - What rules, formal and informal, control the group? Is there avoidance of conflict or of certain topics? Are there personal attacks?

INFLUENCE - Who has influence? Is it based on expertise, resources, or social status? Does influence shift? If so, why and how?

ATMOSPHERE - Is it friendly? Tense? Fun? Competitive? Open to different opinions and ideas?

SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTION

DESIGNING ACTIVITIES

Appropriate and effective structured activities are central to successful small groups. Your expertise and guidance are offered through these activities. A major investment of time and energy is required to design activities that will facilitate learning. Activities must promote learner participation. Effective small group activities have the following attributes:

INTERESTING - Activities are relevant and realistic for the group members and the group setting. Variables to consider include participants' educational background, work experience, communication skills, and expectations. Middle-aged, mid-level manufacturing supervisors in a quality control short course will need different activities than 18 to 22 year-old college sophomores in a survey class on Eastern mysticism. The activities will involve different processes as well as different content.

CLEARLY DEFINED - Objectives are specific and easily understood. Products and outcomes are described. Activities relate to the course objectives.

SEQUENCED - Activities build on one another and build on the developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the group participants.

WELL PACED - The pace is lively but not hectic. Enough time is allowed.

FLEXIBLE - Change can be introduced into the design to handle unforseen situations.

PARTICIPATIVE - Activities require input from most of the group members.

When designing group activities, attend to the logistical details necessary to implement the activities. Provide adequate supplies, enough time, proper physical environment, and necessary equipment.

SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTION
RESOURCES FOR DESIGNING ACTIVITIES

Small group activities can be designed by the instructor, "borrowed" from other instructors, or adapted from books, journals, and other printed resources. If an activity is available in print and can be used, a lot of time can be saved.

There are many resources for small group exercises and activites:

1) Exercises are often provided with instructors' guides to specific texts.

2) Journals on general teaching techniques and journals on specific subject matter carry group activity designs.

3) The ERIC clearinghouse is an extensive educational database that includes information on group activities.

4) Books are available that deal exclusively with small group activities.

Books describing small group activities that can be adapted to a variety of educational/training settings include:

Forbess-Greene, Sue, The Encyclopedia of Icebreakers: Structured Activities That Warm-Up, Motivate, Challenge, Acquaint, and Energize. University Associates, Inc. San Diego, 1980

Mill, Cyril R., Activities for Trainers: 50 Useful Designs, University Associates, Inc., San Diego, 1980.

Newstrom, John W., and Scannell, Edward E., Games Trainers Play: Experiential Learning Exercises. McGraw-Hill, New York, 1980.

Newstrom, John W., and Scannell, Edward E., More Games Trainers Play: Experiential Learning Exercises. McGraw-Hill, New York, 1983.

Pfeiffer, J. William, and Jones, John E., The Annual Handbook for Group Facilitators, University Associates, Inc., San Diego, 1987.

Pfeiffer, J. William, and Jones, John E., A Handbook of Structured Experiences for Human Relations Training, Vols 1 - 10, University Associates, Inc., 1985.

Thayer, Louis, C., Fifty Strategies for Experiential Learning: Book I& II, University Associates Inc., San Diego, 1976, 1981.

SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTION

TYPES OF ACTIVITIES

You can use the techniques listed below to get groups actively working toward some common goals. This list is by no means exhaustive or rigidly defined. Take these techniques and adapt them to meet the needs of your particular instructional situation.

ICE-BREAKERS These start-up activities help participants ease into the course. Ice-breakers are relatively subject matter free, while OPENERS relate to the content matter. Ice-breakers and Openers can be conventional, relevant, and controlled. They can also be novel, irrelevant, and experiential. Your choice of activity will depend on the class content, type of students, expectations of students, length of course, and your style and personality.

BRAINSTORMING This process stresses deferred judgement and quantity to get quality. Members of a small group toss out as many ideas as possible about a particular topic or problem. All ideas are written down. No criticism or evaluation of ideas is allowed until later. Brainstorming separates the creation of ideas from the evaluation of ideas. This deferred judgement of ideas results in more creativity and a larger volume of ideas. Rules for brainstorming can include:

1) No criticism of ideas
2) The wilder the better. The group can always make ideas more "realistic" in a later evaluation session.
3) Quantity is desired. The more ideas the better.
4) Piggybacking is allowed. An idea can be an embellishment of someone else's idea or a combination of several other ideas.
5) One idea at a time. Give everyone a chance to contribute.

Brainstorming can be used for theoretical discussions or practical applications. Groups brainstorm to identify problems, determine causes for problems, and propose solutions to problems.

BUZZ GROUPS Small groups form from a larger class and interact briefly (less than one hour) on a specific question. Group opinions are shared, via a spokesperson, to the entire class. Questions should be focused enough to limit unproductive rambling yet general enough to elicit discussion. Avoid questions that can be answered yes or no.

PHILLIPS 66 Small groups discuss a topic and develop questions about it. Name comes from the inventor and 66 refers to 6 people interacting for 6 minutes, though size and time can vary. Questions can be addressed by the instructor, a panel, or another discussion group.

FISHBOWL A small group demonstrates process skills for the rest of the class or small groups are paired with one group performing group activities and the other group acting as group process observers. Groups can later exchange roles. This process is helpful in developing awareness of and skills in group techniques.

EXPANDING GROUPS Groups of two form, discuss a problem or situation, and arrive at a consensus regarding a solution or tactics to try. Pairs form groups of four, compare answers, and reconcile differences. These groups combine to form groups of eight and again arrive at consensus about the issue being discussed. Groups of eight then share their findings with the class at large.

NOMINAL GROUP PROCESS This is another problem solving and idea generating technique that can be used to build interest for a new topic, explore alternative points of view, or develop a plan of action. Steps include:

1. Group members write down (individually and silently) their ideas for solving the problem presented;
2. A group leader records the ideas one at a time on the board or flip chart;
3. Ideas are discussed for clarification, not evaluation;
4. Group members immediately prioritize the ideas. The group decision is based on the ranking of group members' votes.

GUIDED DESIGN — Small groups of 3-4 students are given a situation or problem and asked to come to consensus regarding their handling of the situation or problem. An answer sheet gives students a model with which to compare their answers.

ROLE PLAYING — With this technique participants act out real-life situations in a protected, "safe" environment. Participants either act out the role play, critique their own performance, or critique others. Role Play gives participants feedback about their performance that is often not available in the "real world".

SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTION
DEGREE OF USE - HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

Instructors use small group methods to different degrees. Some use small groups as a minor adjunct to the classroom lecture while other instructors employ small group methods as the exclusive method of instruction. The following examples show different degrees to which small groups can be used.

Limited Use

Every 10 - 15 minutes during a lecture students are asked to discuss a statement or question for 45 - 60 seconds with their neighbor. This short technique effectively stimulates student participation on a limited basis and offers some instructional variety.

Moderate Use

A popular model for integrating small groups with other instructional methods on a consistent basis involves:

Individual Study - Students prepare and study materials alone. This puts responsibility for learning on the individual student.

Individual Exam - Students are tested on the materials they have studied.

Group Discussion - Small groups study materials, using the individual test results as a starting point. Clarification is sought, assumptions cleared up, and some points explored in more detail.

Group Exam - Small groups are tested on the materials covered. Cooperation and consensus are stressed. Individual students receive the score of the group in which they participate.

Lecture - Armed with the results of both the individual tests and the group tests, the instructor can develop a lecture that clarifies points of confusion and expands from the common knowledge base present in the class. The lecture can be tightly focused on the specific needs and understanding of the students.

Extensive Use

Small groups are formed early in the class and function throughout the term. Mouton and Blake (1984) offer four distinct learning group designs that are selectively used to strengthen knowledge comprehension, skills acquisition, and attitude development. Each design includes:

Individual preparation by group members
Groupwork
Evaluation of progress
Evaluation of groupwork

The four designs and the group work for each design are as follows:

The Team Effectiveness Design (TED)

Discussion
Consensus
Individual Testing
Group Testing

The Team-Member Teaching Design (TMTD)

Team Member Teaching
Testing
Critique of Learning
Critique of Members' Teaching

The Performance Judging Design (PJD)

Team Development of Skills Criteria
Comparison of Criteria With External Standards
Consensus on Criteria to Use
Group Discussion of Individual Sample Performances
Group Evaluation of Sample Performances

The Clarifying Attitudes Design (CAD)

Self Assessment
Group Consensus as to Sound Attitudes
Discussion of Differences Between Sound and Actual Attitudes
Strategies for Behavior Change

SMALL GROUP TEACHING TECHNIQUES

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bouton, Clark & Garth, Russell Y., editors. Learning in Groups San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc., Number 14, 1983. This sourcebook offers examples of small groups used as the principal and often exclusive instructional process at the college level.

Eitington, Julius E. The Winning Trainer Houston, TX: Gulf Publishing, 1984. An excellent guide for involving students in the learning process. It explains how to use group techniques, offers examples, and presents methods for designing small group activities.

Johnson, David W. & Johnson, Frank P. Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills, 3rd Edition Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1987. A theoretical text on group development and group processes. Good sections on decision making, conflict, communications, and leadership.

Orlich, Donald C. et al Teaching Strategies : A Guide to Better Instruction Lexington, MA: D C Heath. 1985. Includes chapters on small group learning principles, different types of small group discussions, and techniques for encouraging learning in small groups.

Mouton, Jane S. & Blake, Robert R. Synergogy: A new Strategy for Education, Training, and Development San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1984. Offers four detailed models for using small groups in an intensive and comprehensive manner.

VOCATIONAL INSTRUCTOR TEACHING SKILLS PROJECT

VIDEOTAPE EVALUATION

1. TAPE TOPIC _____

2. Did you experience any technical difficulties with the tape?
   Yes___ No ___
   If yes, please elaborate. _____
   _____

3. Was the videotape content helpful? Yes ___ No ___
   _____
   _____

4. Do you have any suggestions for improving the presentation? _____
   _____
   _____

5. Do you work with non-traditional role students (males in traditional female occupational areas or females in traditional male occupational areas)?
   Yes ____ No ___

   If yes, will the videotape materials help you in meeting this group's needs? _____
   _____
   _____

6. Do you work with handicapped and disadvantaged students?
   Yes ___ No ___

   If yes, will the videotape materials help you in meeting this group's needs? _____
   _____
   _____

7. Comments : _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

VOCATIONAL INSTRUCTOR TEACHING SKILLS PROJECT

RESOURCE MATERIALS EVALUATION

1. CONTENT TOPIC _____

2. Did you find the resource materials helpful?
   Yes ___ No ___
   _____
   _____

3. What material was most helpful? _____
   _____

4. What material was least helpful? _____
   _____

5. Do you know of any materials you believe we should add to the packet? _____
   _____

6. Do you work with non-traditional role students (males in traditional female occupational areas or females in traditional male occupational areas)?
   Yes ____ No ___

   If yes, will these materials help you in meeting this group's needs? _____
   _____
   _____

7. Do you work with handicapped and disadvantaged students?
   Yes ___ No ___

   If yes, will these materials help you in meeting this group's needs? _____
   _____
   _____

8. Comments : _____
   _____
   _____
   _____